

The Month of Tevet: Strengthening our Walls and Personal Boundaries

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Introduction

The Tenth day of the Tenth Month (Tevet) is a fast day, in commemoration of the siege of Jerusalem, the beginning of the destruction of the Temple, but how is this day relevant to us today? It is a day devoted to safeguarding the walls of our identity, repairing its breaches, and making sure its gates are functioning properly – to protect our personal boundaries while filtering and allowing in only what promotes our growth on all levels. Through our personal gates we can also project our energy to the environment – our love and light to everyone crossing our path. On this date – in the year 425 BCE – the armies of the Babylonian emperor, Nebuchadnezzar, laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. This was the first of a series of events leading to the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel. Thirty months later, on the ninth of Tammuz, the walls of Jerusalem were breached, and on the ninth of Av of that year, the Holy Temple was destroyed. The Jewish people were exiled to Babylonia for seventy years. Every year, we observe the Tenth of Tevet as a day of fasting and repentance – wherein we mourn the tragic events of the day, contemplate their deeper causes in our own souls and deeds, and work to correct them.

Read on to learn about the special numerical value of the four fast days for the Temple, and its connection to the organ of the month. You will also learn about the balance between your personal walls and boundaries and their opening gates.

The Four Fasts and the Name of Hashem

There are four fast-days that commemorate the destruction of the Temple: The 17th of *Tamuz* (in the fourth month), the 9th of *Av* (in the fifth month), the 3rd of *Tishrei* (in the seventh month), and the 10th of *Tevet* (in the Tenth month). When our Temple will be rebuilt B”H! each of these days of mourning and fasting will become holidays of celebration and joy:

כֹּה אָמַר ה'שֵׁם צְבָאוֹת צוֹם הַרְבִּיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יְהוָה לְשִׂשׁוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמִצְעָדִים טוֹבִים וְהָאֵמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אֶהְבּוּ: (זכריה פרק ח פסוק יט)

“The fast of the fourth [month], and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall [in the future] be for the House of Yehuda for joy and happiness and holidays, therefore love the truth and peace.”¹

All of these special days have the potential to draw down Divine grace from the ultimate source of mercy, G-d’s Name *Havayah*. The epitome of this process is on the Tenth of **Tevet**. When we add up the numbers of the months in which these fast days occur we get the numerical value of

¹ Zechariah 8:19.

Hashem (*Havayah*) (4+5+7+10=26) – The special name which represents kindness, mercy and miracles. On these fast days and especially on the Tenth of Tevet there is an opening to pull down spiritual emanations from Hashem’s holy name and connect with the light of the Temple. We then have the opportunity to connect with this light and build the eternal Temple in our heart. With this soul work we can even manifest the desires of our heart in our physical reality.²

Sweetening the Liver

It is interesting to note that the numerical value of the Hebrew word for liver – כֶּבֶד/*kaved*, the organ of the month of Tevet, also adds up to 26 (20+2+4). *Havayah*. By fasting over the destruction we can access the energy of the special name of Hashem and rectify our liver – the seat of both lusts and anger.³ By mindfully fasting on the Tenth of Tevet, and curbing our selfish desires and anger, we have the ability to “sweeten” Hashem’s anger at Israel, which caused the destruction of the Temple. Thus our fast and repentance arouses Hashem’s mercy to rebuild our lost Temple.

Liberating the Siege

Without detracting in any way from the need to mourn and rectify the negativity of the events of the Tenth of Tevet, we must also seek the positive aspect of the siege. Although coming under siege is a horrible victimizing experience, with famine, plague and bloodshed, beneath all that negativity, however, lies the liberating and empowering realization: We’re in this together! Despite our differences, despite the animosities and quarrels that drive us apart, we share a common fate, a common identity, a common goal. Being under siege brings to light a truth that was always there but which we had been prevented from seeing – the truth that we are all one. Let us hold on to this truth and possess it, without its negative trappings. Let us rid ourselves of the negativity of the Tenth of Tevet and retain only its positive core.

Walls with Gates

Being under siege is being walled in. Walls enclose, insulate, isolate. Walls cut you off from the world. But a broken wall signifies danger. If it’s holding back a river, water will come pouring in. If the wall is securing a border, enemies may infiltrate its breaches. A broken wall means vulnerability, exposure, loss of identity. What, then, is it that we need? We need walls with gates in them. We need strong walls, with gates that open and close. We need gates that are open during the day and closed at night. We need gates that open to allow people to pass in and out to exchange ideas and energy; gates that also close, to safeguard the our personal boundaries and keep out harmful and destructive forces. How good it is if your city, your community, your family, you own body and your own soul, have strong walls with properly functioning gates, so that you are secure in your own identity, protective of what is best and most precious in yourself, and open to the world to give and receive, learn and teach.

² This paragraph is based on Rav Ginsburgh, Gal Enai, <<http://www.inner.org/times/tevet/tevet.htm>>.

³ The liver gets angry, the gall bladder injects in it a drop and calms it down (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 61b*).

The Importance of Beginnings

The tenth always denotes holiness. The Tenth day of the Tenth month would even supersede Shabbat if it would have been possible for it to fall on Shabbat. We learn this from the words of the prophet:

כָּן אָדָם כָּתוּב \ {כְּתוּב} לְךָ אֶת שֵׁם הַיּוֹם אֶת עֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה סִמְךָ מֶלֶךְ בְּכָל אֵל יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
(יחזקאל פרק כד, פסוק ב)

“Son of man, write for you the name of the day, even of this selfsame day; this selfsame day the king of Babylon had invested Jerusalem.”⁴

The phrase הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה/בְּעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה is the same expression used in describing Yom Kippur which overrides Shabbat.⁵ What is the importance of the Tenth of Tevet that it would override Shabbat? The beginning always sets the tone. The reason we fast on the ninth of Av rather than the tenth when most of the Temple burned down is because we mourn mainly over the beginning of a calamity.⁶ This principle teaches us the seriousness of the fast of the Tenth of Tevet, since that day was the very beginning, when the king of Babylon laid a siege on Yerushalayim prior to its destruction.⁷ This year we will be fasting on the day that leads to Shabbat – on the Eve on Shabbat – Friday. As we fast and mourn while preparing for Shabbat, let us keep in mind that just as our fast day is a gateway leading towards the holy Shabbat – a glimpse of the world to come, so will the mourning for the Temple, and the selfishness leading to its destruction, lead to its rebuilding, and bring about the renewed reality which will be completely infused with the holiness of Shabbat.⁸

⁴ Yechezkiel 24:2.

⁵ Vayikra 23:29.

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 29a.

⁷ B’nei Yissaschar, Article for Kislev and Tevet 14.

⁸ Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a.



Midreshet
B'erot Bat Ayin

Holistic Torah Study for Women

(011-972-2) 993-4945

info@bzerotbatayin.org

www.bzerotbatayin.org